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Preliminary Results from Exercise for Health: A Breast Cancer Recovery Project

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The Exercise for Health program is a telephone-delivered exercise intervention for women with breast cancer (BC) living in regional Queensland. The effect of the program is being evaluated in the context of a randomised controlled trial. Consenting, newly diagnosed BC patients, treated in one of 8 regional Queensland hospitals, were randomly allocated to telephone-based exercise counselling (EC) or usual care (UC) at 6-weeks post-surgery. EC participants received an exercise workbook and 16 calls from an exercise physiologist over 8 months. Physical activity levels (PA) (Active Australia & CHAMPS), quality-of-life (FACTB+4), upper-body function (DASH) and fatigue (FACIT-Fatigue) were assessed at baseline (4-6 weeks post-surgery), 6- and 12-months post-surgery. Preliminary analyses of available 6-month data were conducted using t-tests and repeated measures ANCOVAs. Participating women (n=143; EC n=73, UC n=70) were aged 53±9 years and 30% met PA guidelines at baseline. Up to two thirds of the women received adjuvant therapy during the first 6 months following surgery. Greater improvements (mean change±SD) occurred for the EC vs UC group in weekly sessions of walking (1.83±4.3 vs -0.5±5.5, p=0.029) moderate-vigorous PA (5.0±6.5 vs -1.1±6.1, p=0.005) and strength training (1.9±2.9 vs -0.5±4.2 p<0.001), and in upper-body function, reflected by lower log-transformed disability scores (-0.34±0.44 vs -0.17±0.28, p=0.038). More EC than UC participants met PA guidelines at 6 months (46.3% vs 32.7%). Preliminary findings from this ongoing trial suggest that the telephone is a feasible and effective medium for delivering exercise counselling to newly diagnosed BC patients living in regional areas.